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ABSTRACT

The role of the principal during the past two decades can be addressed by looking at the major developments of the era as they influenced the evolution of the principal's role. Fundamental changes in school structure were popularized during the expansionist period of the late 1950s and 1960s. Principals had to be agents of change. Then, a note of pessimism began to invade the optimism of the period. Reaction to the Coleman (1966) and Jensen (1969) studies, along with Vietnam and the student uprisings, symbolized the erosion of the great hopes of the period. However, further research suggests that schools can make a difference. Specific attitudes and behaviors of the principal that can be linked to success in the next decade emerge from a series of interviews and observations of successful principals in Detroit (Michigan). Successful principals have a positive self-image: like being a principal: communicate a sense of optimism to every child and teacher: have a clearly defined sense of mission and purpose: survey their resources and utilize every penny available: and foster ownership and pride in the school by its students, staff, and neighborhood. (Author/MLF)

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"THE PRINCIPAL MAKES THE DIFFERENCE"

CLINIC C-49
SCHOOL-BASED MANAGEMENT: HOW IT WORKS AND HOW TO MAKE IT WORK FOR YOUR DISTRICT

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In considering the successful principal in the decade ahead, we have chosen to look briefly at two primary questions: First, how has the role of the principal been defined in the recent past, i.e., the past two decades? Second, what are some of the specific attitudes and behaviors that will be linked to success in the next decade? In looking at the first question we rejected a micro-analysis of the research on specific role behaviors of the principals. Instead, we were interested in the major developments of the era as they influenced the evolution of the principal's role.

Our postulations on the second question emerge from our view of a large metropolitan system. Many principals who had been considered among the most successful in prior decades suddenly found that they could not adjust their practices fast enough to survive the 1970's. If the changes in the next ten years in regard to the expectations of a principal are as drastic as those we have seen in the past ten years, it would take a seer rather than an educator to focus on the role of the principal. Nevertheless, some important research has taken place during the past decade which helps in

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understanding the differences we see among schools. These results will, in our opinion, bear heavily upon the behavior of principals in the future.

The Principal in the Recent Past

Those of us who entered our profession during the expansionist period of the late 1950's and 1960's can only now fully realize the magnitude of the adjustments that took place. It is needless to recite the litany of fundamental changes in structure that were popularized in this period: Modularized scheduling, individualized instruction, alternative schools, and mini-courses; staff development, collective bargaining, career education, and performance objectives. These terms and many more were popularized in the educational jargon of the period as schools attempted to reflect society and expand the freedom and the possibilities for its clientele. Schools took on a host of functions that were previously outside their purview.

Principals, of course, maintained a key role during this period just as they had always played an important role in the educational process. Those who entered graduate school and principal training during this period vividly remember the description of that role. As principals they had to be agents of change. By word and deed they were to be a part of that "change agent" philosophy that characterized "success" during the 1960's.

We quickly learned that those successes could be extremely short-lived. Resistance to change often became a much more powerful element than the ideas and persuasiveness of the administrator. A note of pessimism began to invade the optimism of

the period. Reaction to the Coleman study (1966) of equal educational opportunity symboled the erosion of the great hopes of the period. Vietnam and the student uprisings completed their destruction. The fundamental premise of the 1960's that schools were the social vehicle to enable our society to achieve new plateaus was smashed in ignominy. With it went the change agents of the period to be replaced by the gatekeepers.

There were ample reasons for becoming a gatekeeper during the late 1960's. Coleman's study was interpreted to mean schools were of minor importance in helping students to learn. Jensen's study (1969) was whispered to have presented similar conclusions except that heredity rather than home environment was the devil that prevented schools from achieving the goals set out for it by society. The pessimistic research of the times indicated to principals that schools couldn't work at a time that collective bargaining, pressure groups, and other problems associated with the period were indicating to them that schools didn't work. The double dose was more than the palate could bear and in many cases the principals were forced into behavior that enabled them to survive. Survival behavior replaced change agent behavior as the voguish term for the period.

Research mirrors the tenor of the time. Studies similar to those of Coleman and Jensen heralded a difficult era for principals. Those of us involved with administrators at the time remember clearly the fact that "can't do" replaced "can do" in their terminology, and student demands rather than student needs were foremost on their minds. As with all major changes, however, some

individuals refused to change their approach. They denied growing negative attitude about schools and their ability to help change the social structure.

In our estimation the biggest contribution made by Coleman, Jensen and others was to sponsor further research. These efforts were slow in developing and they are certainly not definitive at this point in time. Nevertheless, enough evidence exists to suggest that "school can make a difference," to quote the title of one study, and to suggest that the futility parented by the Coleman study was ill-founded.

The focal point of this research has been the relationship between key school variables and student achievement. In recent years student achievement has taken on the aura of the ultimate criterion. The professionals have long postulated about the effects of teacher behavior on student achievement, or certain curriculum approaches and student achievement; but we have not focused on principal behaviors and their relationship to student achievement. In the past the relationship seemed as remote as the office and the classroom. The present research on school effectiveness reflects directly on all aspects of the school environment.

While much of the research that has been conducted relates to material other than principal behavior, several studies included the principal as a dimension in the research. Studies by Brookover, et.al. (1976), and Brookover, Lezotte, et.al. (1977) support the contention that the expectations that a principal holds has an effect on student achievement. In those studies it was not unusual to see the principal regularly in the classroom as an inducement to

students rather than as a check on teachers. This type of behavior occurred more often in schools classified as effective, i.e., in schools where student achievement was improving.

In addition to having expectations about students and their ability, and communicating those expectations, principals in effective schools were also found to be greatly interested in curriculum and instruction matters. Weber (1971) found that in four effective inner-city schools the principal was committed to working directly with staff for curriculum and instruction strategies. Rankin (1979) found that 98% of region staff and principals described successful principals as curriculum leaders. Similar findings were noted by Brookover and Lezotte (1977) and Brookover (1976).

Both Brookover studies, the Rankin study, a study by Ron Edmonds (1979), as well as other research report that the principal exerts strong leadership by maintaining discipline in the school as well as providing a system of evaluation throughout the program. While these two areas are not the sole determinants of "strong leadership," ninety-nine percent of the principals in the Rankin study were described as "in charge" and "believes everyone is accountable." Brookover and Lezotte characterize the principal of an effective school as both a disciplinarian and as an evaluator of objectives and teacher performance.

There is little evidence to support the notion that the traditional management functions are unrelated to scho[illegible]ffectiveness. Rankin reports that 98% of the principals of effective schools were characterized as having a management system. Brookover describes an effective school in which the principal has a "hands-off" approach to curricular matters combined with an efficient management

system. The staff and school maintain the momentum provided by the previous principal. Thus, the ability to perform traditional "management" duties and school effectiveness may also be positively related. If so, as we expect it is, the characteristics of more effective schools go beyond the superficial curriculum versus management functions.[1]

As the behavior of the principal and its relationship to student achievement becomes the subject of further analysis, we feel safe in saying that not only can schools make a difference, but principals can make a difference as well.

While we admit that the research in the area is not at all definitive, we approach the 1980's with a decided optimism about the role of the principal that was not present ten years ago. In light of this optimism the second question concerning the specific attitudes and behaviors of the principal that can be linked to success in the next decade are explored.

The Principal in the 1980's

It is clear that if there is a successful model urban school, it will be powered by a principal who can keep the enterprise running toward its main goal. The studies previously referred to have shown time and time again that schools existing side by side in areas heavily impacted by urban blight can show marked difference in student achievement. Even a casual observer can extrapolate

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[1]See Edmonds (1979) for more detail on the research on student achievement.

that the successful urban schools entering the 1980's will be led by principals who make a difference in achievement. What characteristics make this difference? Based upon a series of informed interviews and observations of successful principals in Detroit, the following behaviors and attitudes emerge.

The single most significant factor is self-image. Successful principals feel that being a school principal is an important job. They are proud of their profession, and feel that what they do has an impact on the lives of both the young people and adults with whom they interact. They do not behave as if the principal's role is a way station to the central office, but rather a significant goal in and of itself. They do not mutter incoherently when asked at a cocktail party what they do, but respond proudly. They feel they are in control of their own destiny, and delight in the challenges of the role.

Principals who survive and succeed in the demanding schools of the 1980's will like being a principal, it is that simple. The principalship is the last management station for that breed of human being who enjoys proximity to youth. During an interview with one Detroit inner-city high school principal the usual gripes about the inept bureaucracy were raised. It was not long before he confessed, however, that he simply liked being a principal. He enjoyed his relationship with the students in the school. He felt close to the "kids"--"among them" if you will--and this feeling kept him youthful. (It should also be noted that the inherent danger in this managerial style is that it can be physically

taxing if the principal is unwilling to delegate duties that take him out of the mainstream of activities.)

To succeed in the "1980's," the principal will manage the school as if we believes everyone can learn--students, staff and self. This sense of optimism, even missionary zeal, has to permeate the entire school. It is only with this sense of optimism communicated to every teacher and child with sincerity, that the children of the city can be educated to compete successfully in an increasingly complex world.

The successful principal will be a single-purposed planner. Each of the successful principals interviewed had a clearly defined sense of mission and purpose. Moreover, that sense of purpose is shared by the staff. The goal is out there; it is visible as opposed to esoteric. It is a goal that people believe in, own, and realistically hope to achieve. In addition, there is a plan to attain the goal. It may be a detailed plan or an informal one--but it is there.

The successful principals will realize that there will never be enough money to run schools, and will complain bitterly about it. What will separate them from their less successful colleagues is that they will survey their resources and utilize every penny available. One of the characteristics we found that separates successful schools from their counterparts was that successful schools had zero balances in their accounts. Every available dollar was spent--and then wrung dry.

Schools run by a successful principal in the next decade will have more than a climate conducive to learning. The quality may best be described as a climate conducive to living. The school will be differentiated from other schools in that it fosters ownership and pride by its students, staff and neighborhood. Schools in Detroit visited by the authors having this "aura" are easily recognized. And in each case the principal has the dynamism and optimism that infests the school.

These are some of the characteristics of leadership that will permeate the successful schools during the 1980's. As difficult as they are to recognize, the challenge for education may rest with the ability of the institution to identify leaders with these characteristics for our schools. Principals made a difference in the past and they will make a difference in the future.

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